

Jesus Prayer

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"As Karl Rahner said, 'The Christian of the future will have to be a mystic.'

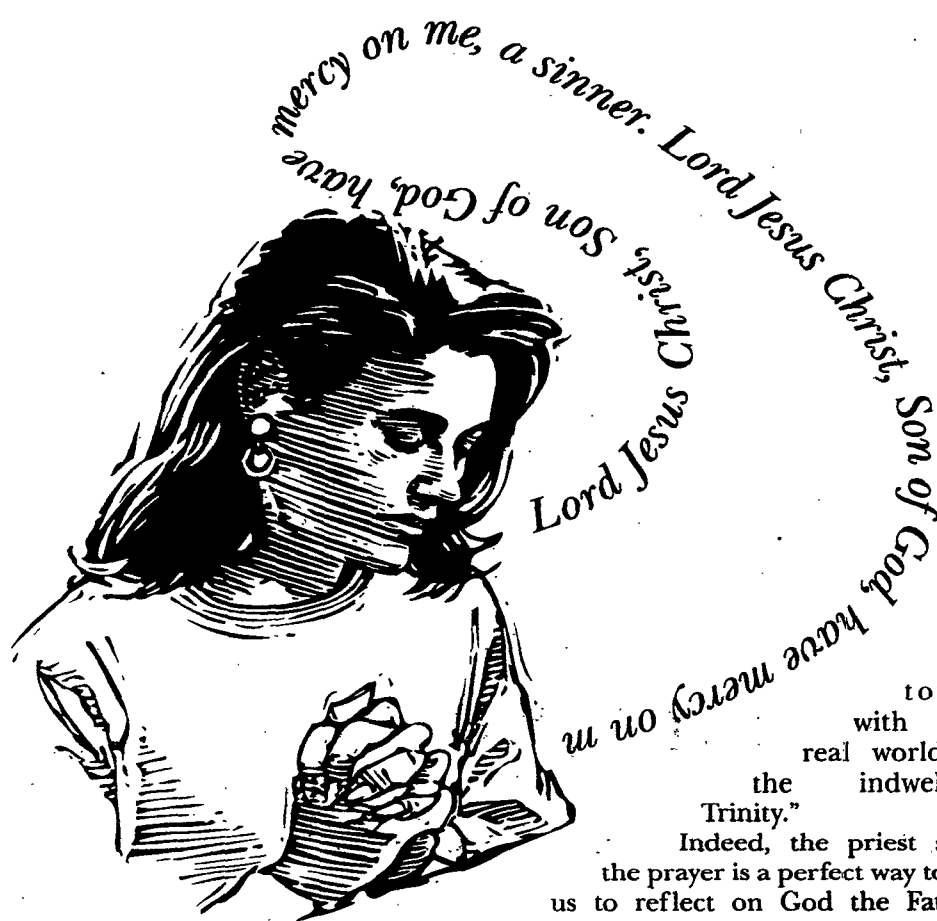
One of the prayer's advantages is its flexibility, Ware wrote. It may be said during formal prayer time, "or else it may be said in a 'free' way as we go about our daily work, in particular when we are engaged in some repetitive of mechanical tasks, as also during all the scattered moments of the day that would otherwise be wasted, when we are waiting for something to happen."

Father Maloney said the prayer is indeed appropriate for people who are not contemplatives — and do not have the luxury of ascetical practices or of repeating the prayer thousands of times with the rules of form, and breathing that governed the Byzantine monks' technique for saying it.

"We can't do vigorous ascetical practices," Father Maloney said. "But we can tap into that practice of becoming centered in the Lord."

Thus, Father Maloney suggested, people can begin their days by setting aside approximately 20 minutes to say the prayer.

"The secret is once you start your day deeply centered with just the name of Jesus, it's a tremendous focus that just runs through the whole day," Father Maloney said. People saying the



prayer can continue to do so during free moments during the day, and before going to bed as well, he added.

Unlike other forms of prayer in which the individual seeks something, Father Maloney continued, through the Jesus Prayer, "we are just getting in

non-Christians — will permit me to serve you as well," he continued.

Bishop Moynihan added that the bishop's role is "not to dominate but to animate, to breathe life into the Christian community that he is called to serve."

"I ask for your prayers," he said later. "I ask for your understanding — I ask for your help — to remind me constantly of the Christian calling that I share with you, to be strengthened and enlightened to carry out the role entrusted to me of leadership and animation."

Bishop Moynihan recalled the day of his ordination to the priesthood — Dec. 15, 1957. The ceremony was in the morning and afterward his parents went back to their hotel (Bishop Moynihan was ordained in Rome) to rest.

When the young priest arrived at the hotel awhile later, he found his father sitting on the side of his bed rubbing his eyes.

"I really can't believe you're a priest," Michael Moynihan said to his son.

"I wonder what he is saying today!" Bishop Moynihan said to the laughter of his well-wishers and supporters.

Duffy is associate editor of The Catholic Sun, newspaper of the Diocese of Syracuse.

name he will give you.")

The prayer's words derive out of the blind men's plea to Jesus in Matthew 9:27 ("Son of David, have mercy on us.") and the publican in Luke 18:13 ("Oh God, have mercy on me, a sinner.")

The Desert Fathers in Egypt and Syria sought to center themselves on contemplating Christ, and the prayer began to evolve — in conjunction with fasting and ascetical practices — as a means to overcome temptation.

Indeed, St. John Chrysostom, a Doctor of the Church who died in 407 A.D., observed that a Christian should continually say the prayer "so that the name of the Lord Jesus descending into the depths of the heart, should subdue the serpent ruling over the inner pastures and bring life and salvation to the soul. He should always live with the name of the Lord Jesus, so that the heart swallows the Lord and the Lord the heart, and the two become one."

Out of the experience of the Desert Fathers, a type of spirituality developed in Eastern Christians known as *hesychasm*, a Greek word roughly translated as "rest" or "tranquility." The goal, Father Maloney explained, is "to bring about a state of attentive listening and surrender to God's word heard in the depths of one's being."

The prayer's structure was standardized between the seventh and 14th centuries, Father Maloney said. The process of codifying the practice of saying the prayer — complete with directions on how to sit and how to recite the prayer in rhythm with one's breathing — came from Mount Athos in Greece, particularly in the 13th century by St. Gregory the Sinaite. One of the prayer's chief defenders was a contemporary of St. Gregory the Sinaite, St. Gregory Palamas.

But while the prayer's form and practice were standardized by Byzantine monks, Father Maloney observed, a person interested in saying the prayer may make his or her own modifications — as long as Jesus is part of it.

The priest noted, for example, that he changes the words to fit in with the liturgical season. Thus, he added, during the Easter season this year, he changed the beginning to: "Jesus risen, my joy ..."

"We can say whatever we feel puts us into the joyful presence of the Lord," Father Maloney said.

Father Maloney noted that the prayer does take consistent work — and that many people at the retreats he guides begin to lose interest when they realize the large commitment involved. They are often afraid to surrender their own wills and desires, he claimed.

"You always have the majority of people who don't want to grow," Father Maloney lamented. "They are too busy."

Nevertheless, the prayer is finding a welcome audience among people who are hungry to experience a deeper relationship with God, Father Maloney said.

"Praying is not asking," Father Maloney concluded. "It is not gabbing. We just surrender in adoration to Jesus. We will never become Christians until we let go."

Bishop

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"My heart is full of joy and gratitude this afternoon," said Bishop Moynihan during his concluding remarks. "It's hard to know where to begin ... I certainly want to begin with our common father in heaven and his son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit for their constant presence in my life, for their incredible goodness to me every day of my life. And of course this day is really like no other."

"I am also very mindful of the part that Mary, the mother of God, has had in my life over these years. (There were) many times that she has really, I feel, taken me by the hand and kept me from harm's way."

The new bishop pledged to serve everyone in the diocese.

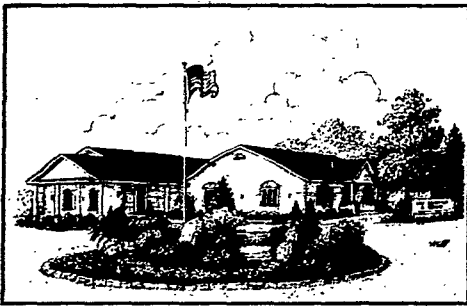
"It seems to me that the bishop of a diocese today should bear in mind one thought in particular. And that is he has been appointed shepherd of the whole flock. Not just of the sheep. Not just of the lambs. He has been called upon to serve everyone — the staying and the straying alike."

"I sincerely pray that many others — Catholics, non-Catholics, Christians,

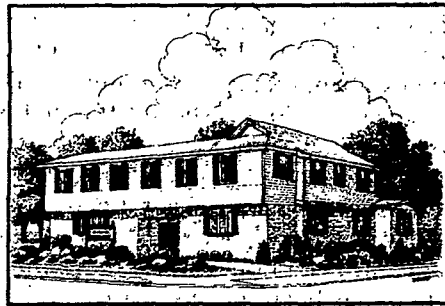
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